

August 19, 2004

Dr. John H. Marburger III, Director
Office of Science & Tech. Policy
Old Executive Office Building
17th & PA Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20502

&

Dr. Bill Gadsby
Vice Pres. - Academic Studies
National Academy of Public Administration
1100 New York Ave., NW
Suite 1090 E
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Dr. Marburger and Dr. Gadsby:

Dr. Marburger, you and the President may not be aware of the incompleteness and partial unreliability of investigations by the NSF Inspector-General. These relatively toothless investigations failed to correct - and actually worsened - the erosions of scientific integrity and professional morale in the NAS/NRC system for social science and economics discussed in my letter of August 14, 2004 to Dr. Warren Washington.

I am sure that you do not have all of the background and details in mind. However, may I add two comments, for the historical record?

1. Dr. Ball's investigation above her pay grade.

Several years ago, my original letter of complaint of derailments of social science research, to Dr. Rita Colwell, warned her that, if she wished to learn about the breakdowns in the NAS/NRC system and to have them corrected, she should meet privately with Dr. Bruce Alberts, President of the National Academy of Sciences. She should not deal with these breakdowns as if they were simple failures of a (lower status) NSF contractor. (To my knowledge, she did not call or meet with him.)

By the time Dr. Colwell had become the new NSF Director, there already had been high-level, off-the-record, evaluations of the facts and discussions with the bad

actors at the National Academy of Sciences via David Hamburg's Carnegie Commission on Science, Technology and Government. Everybody understood that the continuing derailment of social science initiatives, to avoid perceived political controversy, was shaped by Dr. Frank Press, head of the National Academy of Sciences, and was "above the pay grade" of career civil servants. As you know, investigations of breakdowns of major institutions are handled by independent blue-ribbon commissions, like the 9/11 commission, with wide representation, a substantial staff and budget, subpoena power, etc. (e.g., of the kind recommended by Dr. Reischauer.)

When Dr. Catherine Ball, a single mid-level civil servant investigator from NSF, showed-up for an investigation, no senior scientist in the National Academy of Science system would have become involved to initiate serious charges against other senior colleagues. If the investigation had been serious, they would have been contacted at a higher level, and it would have been handled very differently.

- It also is important to register, for the historical record, that Dr. Ball had no academic background in economics. It was apparent, from our first discussion, that she did not understand the econometrics of time series estimation or the alarming violations of scientific integrity or cumulative consequences of the behavior that she was investigating. (She was a linguist. She told me that NSF had no investigators with academic backgrounds in economics.) Hopefully, if Dr. Warren Washington was the head of NIH and trying to understand derailments in cancer research, he would not have assigned a linguist to be his sole investigator or claimed that NSF could not afford a biologist.

Dr. Ball also lacked the professional background to understand the people, the differences between their real arguments and made-up excuses, and the operating norms of the NAS system - e.g., the Mafia-like code of silence expected of NAS members in defending the public persona of their institution and "Science" to outsiders. Nor was she powerful enough to offer "whistle blower" protection to anybody.

2.) The National Academy of Sciences and the National Science Board.

It is very risky for the government, via the National Science Board, to write contracts that allow substantial and independent political influence by the National Academy of Sciences. Its scientific members think of themselves as outranking most of the members of the National Science Board; and they are smart people and - as the current case suggests - adept at stonewalling. (At OSTP, one of Dr. Brandon's predecessors, Dr. Joyce Justus, quit in frustration.)

Sincerely,

(Dr.) Lloyd S. Etheredge, Director
Government Learning Project

cc: Dr. Warren Washington, Dr. Arden Bement, Dr. Christine Boesz